

J. B. Danquah

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Nana **Joseph Kwame Kyeretwie Boakye Danquah** (18 December 1895 – 4 February 1965) was a Ghanaian statesman, pan-Africanist, scholar, lawyer and a historian. He played a significant role in pre- and post-colonial Ghana, which was formerly the Gold Coast, and in fact is credited with giving Ghana its name.^[1] During his political career, Danquah was one of the primary opposition leaders to Ghanaian president and independence leader Kwame Nkrumah. J. B. Danquah was described as the "doyen of Gold Coast politics" by the Watson Commission of Inquiry into the 1948 Accra riots.^[2]

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Joseph Boakye Danquah

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| Born | Joseph Kwame Kyeretwie Boakye Danquah <div>18 December 1895</div> <div>Bepong, Ghana</div> |
| Died | 4 February 1965 (aged 69) <div>Nsawam, Ghana</div> |
| Nationality | Ghanaian |
| Alma mater | University of London |
| Occupation | Lawyer, politician |
| Political party | United Gold Coast Convention |
| Relatives | Nana Akufo-Addo <div>children</div> |

Biography

Early life

Danquah was born on 18 December 1895 in the Ghanaian town of Bepong in Kwahu in the Eastern Region of Ghana. He was descended from the royal family of Ofori Panyin Fie, once the rulers of the Akyem states, and still then one of the most influential families in Ghanaian politics. His elder brother is Nana Sir Ofori Atta I and he is the father of actor Paul Danquah.

Education

At the age of six, J.B. began schooling at the Basel Mission School at Kyebi, going on to attend the Basel Mission Senior School at Begoro. On successfully passing his standard seven examinations in 1912, he entered the employment of Vidal J. Buckle, a barrister-at-law in Accra, as a clerk, a job which aroused his interest in law.

After passing the Civil Service Examinations in 1914, Danquah became a clerk at the Supreme Court of the Gold Coast, which gave him the experience that made his brother Nana Sir Ofori Atta I, who had become chief two years earlier, appoint him as secretary of the Omanhene's Tribunal in Kyebi.^[2] Following the influence of his brother, Danquah was appointed as the assistant secretary of the Conference of Paramount Chiefs of the Eastern Province, which was later given statutory recognition to become the Eastern Provincial Council of Chiefs. His brilliance made his brother decide to send him to Britain in 1921 to read law.

London years

After two unsuccessful attempts at the University of London matriculation, Danquah passed in 1922, enabling him to enter the University College of London as a philosophy student. He earned his B.A. degree in 1925, winning the John Stuart Mill Scholarship in the Philosophy of Mind and Logic. He then embarked on a Doctor of Philosophy degree, which he earned in two years with a thesis entitled "The Moral End as Moral Excellence". He became the first West African to obtain the doctor of philosophy degree from a British university.

While he worked on his thesis, he entered the Inner Temple and was called to the Bar in 1926. During his student days, he had two sons and two daughters by two different women, neither of whom he married. In London, Danquah also took time off his studies to participate in student politics, editing the West African Students' Union (WASU) magazine and becoming the Union's president.

Return to the Gold Coast

Returning home in 1927, Danquah went into private legal practice. In 1929 helped J. E. Casely Hayford found the Gold Coast Youth Conference (GCYC) and was secretary general from 1937 to 1947.^[3] In 1931 Danquah established *The Times of West Africa* (originally called the *West Africa Times*), which was the first daily newspaper in Ghana and was published between 1931 and 1935^[4] A column called "Women's Corner" was pseudonymously written by Mabel Dove, daughter of prominent barrister Francis Dove, and in 1933 she became Danquah's first wife, bearing him a son.^[2] His second wife was named Elizabeth Vardon.^{[2][3]}

Path to Independence

Danquah became a member of the Legislative Council in 1946 and actively pursued independence legislation for his country. In 1947 he helped to found the pro-independence United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) as a combination of chiefs, academics and lawyers,^[5] including George Alfred Grant, Robert Benjamin Blay, R. A. Awoonor-Williams, Edward Akufo-Addo, and Emmanuel Obetsebi-Lamptey. Kwame Nkrumah was invited to be the new party's general secretary. In 1948, following a boycott of European imports and subsequent rioting in Accra, Danquah was one of "the big six" (the others being Nkrumah, Akufo-Addo, Obetsebi-Lamptey, Ebenezer Ako-Adjei and William Ofori Atta) who were detained for a month by the colonial authorities.

Danquah's historical research led him to agree with Nkrumah's proposition that on independence the Gold Coast be renamed Ghana after the early African empire of that name.^[6] However, Danquah and Nkrumah subsequently disagreed over the direction of the independence movement and parted ways after two years. Nkrumah went on to form the Convention People's Party and eventually became the first president of independent Ghana.

Arrest, detention and death

Danquah stood as a presidential candidate against Nkrumah in April 1960 but lost the election. On 3 October 1961, on the grounds of involvement with alleged plans to subvert the CPP government, he was arrested under the Preventive Detention Act.^[7] He was released on 22 June 1962. He was later elected president of the Ghana Bar Association.^[8]

Danquah was again arrested on 8 January 1964, for allegedly being implicated in a plot against the President. He suffered a heart attack and died while in detention at Nsawam Medium Prison on 4 February 1965.^[9]

After the overthrow of the CPP government in February 1966 by the National Liberation Council (NLC), Danquah was given a national funeral and rehabilitated.

Literary output

Among his writings are *Gold Coast: Akan Laws and Customs and the Akim Abuakwa Constitution* (1928), a play entitled *The Third Woman* (1943), and *The Akan Doctrine of God* (1944).^[6]

Establishment of the University of Ghana

Danquah played an important role in the establishment of the University of Ghana, the premier and the largest university in Ghana.^[10]

Legacy

The J. B. Danquah Memorial Lecture Series was inaugurated in 1968 in memory of Danquah, who was also a founding member of the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences^[11] The Danquah Institute was set up in commemoration of his work and to promote his ideas posthumously.^[12] Danquah Circle a roundabout at Osu in Accra was also named after him.

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